



## At the Tipping Point: Educational Outcomes of Youth in Foster Care in Clark County School District

### Executive Summary

Following a series of tragic events and growing public concern, the Blue Ribbon for Kids Commission was assembled by Nevada Supreme Court Justice Nancy Saitta in September 2014 to look into deficiencies in the child welfare system and courts in Clark County, Nevada. The Commission subsequently established a Public Education Subcommittee to examine the educational status of children in foster care who are enrolled in Clark County School District, the fifth largest district in the United States.

National research finds that educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care lag behind their peers. Unfortunately, the landscape in Nevada is similar. For instance, recent data shared by Clark County School District finds that graduation rates and grade point averages are significantly lower for eleventh and twelfth grade students in foster care than their peers. Over the past year, members of the education subcommittee met to discuss challenges faced by students in foster care, particularly high school students. This policy brief offers several recommendations that may be taken under advisement by Nevada's leaders.

- (1) Promote efforts to codify federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) protections in State law
- (2) Encourage the continued collaboration between the Clark County Department of Family Services (DFS) and the Clark County School District (CCSD)
  - a. Ensure school stability and attempt to locate foster homes near the student's school of origin
  - b. Create necessary enrollment protocols for foster care students, including the immediate transfer of a foster care student's educational records
  - c. Expedite immediate school enrollment and notify the school that the student is in foster care
  - d. Continue to encourage the exchange of data between CCSD and DFS in order to support the academic success of students in foster care
- (3) Explore the establishment of an education passport for students in foster care
- (4) Strengthen the use of the "Academic Learning Plan" for students in foster care
- (5) Expand the scope of trauma-related training for educators and trauma-related services for youth in foster care
- (6) Ensure and expand delivery of educational support services for students in foster care
- (7) Ensure that both CCSD and DFS are providing funding for educational support services and programs needed by students in foster care
- (8) Evaluate and report regularly to state lawmakers and education officials on educational outcomes of students in foster care
- (9) Encourage Nevada's courts to monitor the educational outcomes of students in foster care



## At the Tipping Point: Educational Outcomes of Youth in Foster Care in Clark County School District

### Introduction

As of June 30, 2016, there were a total of 3,234 children in the care of the Clark County Department of Family Services (DFS). This category includes youth in foster care, defined by the U.S. Department of Education as “children who are in state care/custody and whose placements are considered substitute care,” as well as youth living with relatives or in therapeutic care.<sup>1</sup> Of the total amount, just over 1,000 were in foster care.<sup>2</sup> The breakdown by age group of the 3,234 youth in the care of DFS is reported in Table 1.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1. Breakdown by age of all children in the care of Clark County Department of Family Services**

Age	Total	%
5 and under	1,462	45.2
6-12	1,087	33.6
13-17	507	15.7
18 and over	178	5.5
<b>Summary</b>	<b>3,234</b>	<b>100</b>

Following a series of tragic events and growing public concern in recent years, Nevada Supreme Court Justice Nancy Saitta created the Blue Ribbon for Kids Commission in September 2014 to look into deficiencies in the child welfare system and courts in Clark County, Nevada. Among the issues the Commission was tasked to address are: “crowding at Child Haven, the county’s emergency shelter for abused or neglected children, the shortage of foster homes, and long court calendars for child welfare cases. The group will also examine why children are not being released to relatives.”<sup>4</sup>

For a period of six months after the initial convening, a panel of community stakeholders met periodically to review policies and procedures and identify institutional gaps. In March 2015, the Blue Ribbon for Kids Commission published its report, “Moving Forward Together for Clark County’s Children,” which offered a series of recommendations for improving the child welfare system and courts. Following the release of the report, seven subcommittees were formed to implement the recommendations articulated in the report. The subcommittees are: (1) Reasonable Efforts Decision-Making, (2) Child Welfare Agency Process Reform, (3) Court System Process Reform, (4) Meaningful Representation and Voice in the Process from the Initiation of Proceedings, (5) Selection, Retention, Training and Ongoing Professional Development for all Stakeholders, (6) Public Education, and (7) Collaboration for Systemic Reform.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The authors of this policy brief were members of the Public Education Subcommittee of the Blue Ribbon for Kids Commission. The authors served in a voluntary capacity and were not compensated for their service.

This policy brief is the product of the work undertaken by the Public Education Subcommittee. In this policy brief, the authors describe and compare educational outcomes for foster care youth in the Clark County School District to those of their peers. While the Blue Ribbon for Kids Commission Public Education Subcommittee focused on improving educational outcomes for all foster care students in the Clark County School District, this policy brief focuses on students in foster care who are currently attending high school. This brief concludes with a series of recommendations that may be taken under advisement by Nevada's leaders.

## I. Educational Outcomes for Students in Foster Care: The National Landscape

Sadly, albeit perhaps not surprisingly, educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care lag behind their peers. As noted by the U.S. Department of Education, "National research shows that children in foster care are at high-risk of dropping out of school and are unlikely to attend or graduate from college."<sup>5</sup> Additionally, students in foster care are more likely than their peers to have "lower scores on standardized tests and higher absenteeism, tardiness, truancy, and dropout rates."<sup>6</sup> One study found that children placed in foster care scored 16 to 20 percent below non-foster children on state standardized tests.<sup>7</sup> A review of several studies found that the graduation rate for many foster care youth ranged between 44 to 66 percent, and was consistently "at least 10 percentage points below the graduation rate of comparison students in the same age group."<sup>8</sup>

Another study authored by researchers at the Vera Institute of Justice found that foster children often have to repeat a grade, are less likely to perform at grade level, are more likely to have behavior and discipline problems, and are more likely to be assigned to special education classes.<sup>9</sup>

Researchers have identified a number of factors that account in large part for some of these differences in educational achievement. Among these are higher rates of transiency, lack of parental engagement, and bureaucratic challenges (within local school districts). Some of these are discussed below.

### Challenges Faced by Students in Foster Care

#### Instability and Transiency

Research finds that students in foster care move schools at least once or twice a year, and by the time they age out of the system, over one third are likely to have experienced five or more school moves.<sup>10</sup> For instance, the 2015 Youth at Risk of Homelessness, administered by the Clark County Department of Family Services, found that the average number of placements among surveyed youth, including youth in foster care, was ten.<sup>11</sup> Youth in foster care are estimated to lose four to six months of academic progress with each change in school placement, which consequently undermines their ability to perform at grade level and on standardized tests. School transfers also decrease the likelihood that a student in foster care will graduate from high school.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, the frequent moves of youth in foster care often result in delays in enrollment, inappropriate school placements, lack of educational support services, and difficulties in transferring course credits. Excessive school mobility can also impact social development and hinder the foster child's ability to form and sustain connections and supportive relationships with teachers, counselors, peers and caregivers, all of which are critical to the student's long term success. The emotional instability that excessive transiency creates can exacerbate behavioral issues, resulting in disciplinary problems (e.g., poor school performance, truancy, fights, substance abuse, etc.). Unfortunately, youth in care often lack a strong advocate to help navigate the obstacles associated with changing schools.<sup>13</sup>

### **Trauma**

Prior to being placed into foster care, the majority of children have experienced significant trauma from past abuse (physical, emotional, sexual) or neglect, and stress, which can affect "the way their minds and bodies develop and, significantly, the way they function in school."<sup>14</sup> This issue of trauma cannot be underestimated. In recent years, researchers have looked extensively at trauma and its impact on educational outcomes.

Specifically, trauma manifests in the classroom and can lead to adverse education and life outcomes. Research shows that the effects of abuse and neglect and the subsequent trauma adversely impact a student's normal, healthy development. Frequently, students in foster care who are displaying behaviors associated with trauma and stressful home situations are suspended or directed to law enforcement. Additionally, educators are often trained to handle behavioral issues through punitive protocol and progressive discipline, rather than in appropriate intervention strategies. In general, professional development programs for education professionals center around behavior management strategies that do not take into account the needs and situations faced by youth in care.

### **Low Expectations**

A number of reports indicate that expectations, especially around educational attainment, tend to be low for students in foster care.<sup>15</sup> This suggests there is a need to provide more information and support to the adults who care for and/or are responsible for the youth's education. As reported by the National Conference of State Legislatures, "lines of responsibility and accountability for the educational outcomes of children in foster care are unclear" and often, "no single person or agency ultimately is held accountable for results."<sup>16</sup>

### **Special Education**

Another area of concern that warrants attention is the issue of special education. One study found that as many as 30 to 40 percent of all children in foster care are also in special education, which exceeds the rate of the general population.<sup>17</sup> Frequent moves and placements by foster care youth may compromise

the continuous and effective delivery of special education services. Conversely, some have suggested that foster care youth are often unnecessarily placed in special education instead of a regular classroom.<sup>18</sup>

### **Lack of Life Skills Instruction and Preparation for Independence**

Unlike most young people, children in foster care often lack a basic social support system. The Clark County Department of Family Services (DFS), the local child welfare agency, should collaborate with Clark County School District (CCSD), the local education agency, to provide services and support to foster care youth in high school in order to prepare them for life beyond school. The child welfare system and courts must ensure that youth in foster care are provided relevant programming and information related to independent living skills and post-secondary transitions to employment and/or additional education. In short, “preparation for independent living should be a focus in the education of children in long-term foster care.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Disappointing long-term outcomes**

Several studies note that youth who were once in foster care have poor long-term outcomes. Research shows that only 50 percent of foster care youth graduate from high school: of those who graduate, only 20 percent go on to college, while only 10 percent receive a college degree.<sup>20</sup> Unlike many of their peers, many foster children “do not have an adequate safety net or social network and cannot rely on parents or other relatives to facilitate a smooth transition out of the home and into adulthood.”<sup>21</sup> Not surprisingly, then, one study reported that “adults who were formerly in foster care are more likely than the general population to be homeless, unprepared for employment and limited to low-skill jobs, and dependent on welfare or Medicaid. They are also more likely to be convicted of crimes and incarcerated, to succumb to drug and alcohol abuse, or to have poor physical or mental health. Women who have been in foster care experience higher rates of early pregnancy and may be more likely to see their own children placed in foster care.”<sup>22</sup>

## **II. Educational Outcomes for Students in Foster Care: Clark County, Nevada**

Unfortunately, the landscape in Nevada mirrors national trends currently. Specifically, educational outcomes for high school youth in foster care in Clark County School District, Nevada are significantly lower than their peers.

As of September 2016, there were a total of 3,234 children in the care of the Clark County Department of Family Services (DFS). Of the total amount, slightly more than 1,000 were in foster care.<sup>23</sup> During the 2015-2016 school year, there were approximately 65 eleventh and twelfth grade students in foster care.

This school year (2016-2017), data from Clark County School District reveals that there are approximately 137 eleventh and twelfth grade students in foster care (see Table 2). Students in foster care comprise less than 2 percent of the entire student body. Eleventh and twelfth grade students in foster care represent less than one percent of the student body.

**Table 2. Foster Care Students in Clark County School District High Schools<sup>24</sup>**

School Year	Cohort Year	Grade	Total Student Enrollment, not including Foster Care Students	Total Foster Care Students
2015	2015	12	22,173	22
2015	2016	11	23,751	43
2016	2016	12	22,266	61
2016	2017	11	24,506	76

Data reveals that a higher percentage of students in foster care have individualized education plans (IEPs) than the general population (see Table 3). This finding in Clark County School District is similar to national data, which reported that “as many as 30 to 40 percent of all children in foster care are also in special education,” and have IEPs.<sup>25</sup> This finding underscores the need to ensure students in foster care have access to the broad range of services that are consistently administered in order to support them academically.

**Table 3. Participation in IEPs by students in foster care versus their peers<sup>26</sup>**

School Year	Cohort Year	Grade	Total Non Foster Care Students	Total Non Foster Care Students with IEP	% Non Foster Care Students with IEP	Total Foster Care Students	Total Foster Care Students with IEP	% Foster Care Students with IEP
2015	2015	12	22,173	1,298	5.9	22	5	22.7
2015	2016	11	23,751	1,575	6.6	43	8	18.6
2016	2016	12	22,266	1,380	6.2	61	16	26.2
2016	2017	11	24,506	2,100	8.6	76	19	25.0

A comparison between eleventh and twelfth grade students who are in foster care and their peers reveals significant differences in educational outcomes. For example, the graduation rate for students in foster care is lower than the graduation rate for their peers, as is the average Grade Point Average (GPA) (see Table 4). The graduation rate for seniors who graduated in 2016 was 83.9 percent while the graduation rate for seniors in foster care was 47.5 percent. The average GPA for seniors who graduated in 2016 was 2.79, while the GPA for seniors in foster care was 1.85. In addition, the attendance rate of eleventh and twelfth graders in foster care is slightly lower than the attendance rate of their peers who are not in foster care. The attendance rate of seniors in 2015-2016 was 92.5, while the attendance rate for seniors in foster care was 87.5.

Data also reveals that the distribution of grades among eleventh and twelfth grade students in foster care was significantly different than the distribution of grades for their peers (see Table 5). Students in foster care had significantly fewer ‘A’ grades and many more ‘F’ grades than their peers received.

**Table 4. Comparison of educational outcomes between students in foster care and their peers<sup>27</sup>**

School Year	Cohort Year	Grade	Non Foster Care			Foster Care		
			Attendance Rate	GPA	Graduation Rate	Attendance Rate	GPA	Graduation Rate
2015	2015	12	91.5	2.70	84.3	88.3	1.23	59.1
2015	2016	11	92.5	2.70	75.8	92.0	1.36	46.5
2016	2016	12	92.5	2.79	83.9	87.5	1.85	47.5
2016	2017	11	93.3	2.61	.	91.5	1.64	.

**Table 5. Distribution of grades among students in foster care and their peers<sup>28</sup>**

School Year	Cohort Year	Grade	Non Foster Care					Foster Care				
			A	B	C	D	F	A	B	C	D	F
2015	2015	12	33%	26%	21%	13%	7%	24%	27%	21%	17%	12%
2015	2016	11	32%	27%	21%	12%	8%	17%	24%	22%	17%	19%
2016	2016	12	34%	26%	21%	13%	6%	18%	21%	22%	17%	21%

Due to changes in database management systems used by Clark County School District, it is not possible to secure easily longitudinal data on outcomes for students in foster care. However, even a simple snapshot of data over the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years reveals significant disparities in academic outcomes of eleventh and twelfth grade students in foster care compared to their peers who are not in care.

### III. What Resources Are Available to Students in Foster Care?

As stated, youth in foster care likely have experienced higher levels of trauma, as well as excessive mobility and emotional insecurity. Addressing these issues and basic needs may require additional educational and support services to help these students succeed academically. Fortunately, there is federal legislation that contains key protections for students in foster care.

In December 2015, President Obama signed into law the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. For the first time, the federal law now requires states to ensure protections of vulnerable youth in the foster care (and juvenile justice) systems. These key protections, which include school stability and transportation, mandatory data reporting, and agency collaboration, are designed to promote school stability and success among students in foster care.<sup>29</sup>

## **Rights and protections**

The ESSA includes several rights and protections for youth in foster care, a number of which are discussed below.

### Right to remain in the same school when in the student's best interest

Under ESSA, state and local education agencies must assure that students in foster care remain in their school of origin, unless it is not in their best interest. Federal child welfare law already requires child welfare agencies to collaborate with education agencies to ensure school stability when it is in the student's best interest; this law creates reciprocal obligations on education agencies.<sup>30</sup> Under ESSA, the student in foster care shall be placed, or shall remain, at the school of origin until a decision is rendered by the Clark County Department of Family Services (the local child welfare agency) and Clark County School District (the local education agency).

### Immediate enrollment in school and transfer of school records

Under ESSA, students in foster care can enroll immediately in a new school when a school change is necessary, even if the student cannot produce normally required enrollment documents and school records. Additionally, enrolling schools must immediately contact the school last attended by the student to obtain relevant education records.

### School transportation when necessary

By December 10, 2016, local education and child welfare agencies must develop plans for providing cost-effective transportation when needed to allow students in foster care to remain in the same school. Per federal guidance, Clark County School District and Clark County Department of Family Services must work together to identify and implement an efficient, low-cost transportation plan to support students in foster care so that they can remain in their school of origin.

### Local educational agency (LEA) point of contact

The Clark County Department of Family Services can assign an Educational Liaison to work with the Clark County School District regarding educational rights and services available to students in care. Under ESSA, when the child welfare agency (Clark County Department of Family Services) notifies the local education agency (Clark County School District) that it has a point of contact for the education of students in foster care, the local education agency is required subsequently to designate a similar point of contact. DFS has established a point of contact and has a chain of command within the agency to oversee all educational initiatives. In response to ESSA, Clark County School District now has a Foster Care Coordinator that is housed within the Wraparound Services Department. Having points of contacts in both DFS and Clark County School District "can help ensure: streamlined communication and collaboration with the child



welfare agency and the child welfare point of contact; smooth implementation of the provisions of this new law; and, if a school change is warranted, smooth transitions of children by connecting them with their new school communities.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Food services**

Foster care students are automatically eligible to receive Free and Reduced Meals (FRM) immediately at any school and without a lapse when the student moves schools. School districts, in fact, are required to provide free meals to students in foster care. Upon enrollment, the student shall be immediately provided with free meal benefits. The registrar/clerk at the foster care student’s school will ensure that all foster parents/guardians complete the Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) form upon enrollment.

A student who has been identified as a student in foster care shall be immediately eligible for free meals and shall remain eligible as long as the student remains under the care of DFS regardless of the school he or she attends. If a student in foster care changes schools, the FRL form must be completed upon enrollment at the new school. Additionally, the student in foster care remains eligible for free meals through the entire school year even if the student exits foster care before the end of the school year.

### **Academic Learning Plan**

Nevada law requires that an Academic Learning Plan must be developed for every elementary age student in foster care (Nevada Revised Statute 388.155). The Academic Learning Plan shall be developed by the school counselor in collaboration with the student’s teacher, the DFS caseworker if available, the School Based Foster Care Advocate, other relevant school staff, and the foster parent/guardian. Each Academic Learning Plan shall: (a) consider the unique circumstances and educational background of the child; (b) be used as a guide to plan, monitor, and manage the student’s educational development; (c) be used to determine any assistance that may be necessary to the academic success of the student; (d) be reviewed each time a student enrolls in a new school; and (e) be reviewed annually or at the beginning of each school year.

Additionally, Nevada law also requires that all students in middle school, regardless of whether they are in foster care, must have an approved three-year Academic Learning Plan developed during their sixth grade year (CCSD Regulation 5123 and NRS 388.165). The Academic Learning Plan must set forth the specific educational goals the student intends to achieve before promotion to high school. The student and foster parent/guardian must work in consultation with the school counselor to develop the plan. The plan must be reviewed once each school year and revised as necessary.

Finally, Nevada law also requires each student in ninth grade, regardless of whether they are in foster care, to have an approved four-year Academic Learning Plan (NRS.388.205) The plan must set forth the specific educational goals that the student intends to achieve before graduating from high school. The student and foster parent/guardian must work in consultation with the school counselor to develop the Academic Learning Plan, which must be reviewed at least once each school year and revised as necessary.

### **School Based Foster-Care Advocates**

Within Clark County School District, the Wraparound Services Department of the Student Services Division runs the district's Foster Care Initiative.<sup>32</sup> The Wraparound Services Department works with school administrators to ensure each school has a School-Based Foster Care Advocate (SBFCA), who oversees the rights of students in foster care. The School Based Foster Care Advocate is supposed to help foster parents and the Department of Family Services staff navigate services on a local level.

### **Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)**

The mission of the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program is to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy for children and youth in the foster care system.<sup>33</sup> CASAs can support the educational progress of the children they represent, and can serve on the school team evaluating the student's Academic Learning Plan.

### **Educational Surrogates**

The Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada sponsors an Educational Surrogate program designed to support students with disabilities, including those in the foster care system.<sup>34</sup> Briefly, Educational Surrogate parents represent the student in all matters related to identification, assessment, educational placement, and provision of free appropriate public education. This advocacy includes attending Individualized Education Plan meetings, disciplinary meetings, and due process hearing pertaining to the student. Educational Surrogate parents must be notified of all educational decisions and all meetings that pertain to a student's special education services.

### **Independent Living**

Youth in foster care are able to access independent living services at the age of fourteen. These services include areas such as daily living skills, budgeting and money management, relationship building, personal health, career exploration, and housing services, etc.

## IV. Recommendations

While supports do exist for youth in foster care, the stark differences in educational outcomes between foster care youth and their peers suggests that new and/or more effective policies, interventions, and programs are needed to support youth in foster care. Efforts to improve educational outcomes for youth in foster care is an important public policy consideration. Below the authors of this policy brief outline a series of recommendations for consideration by members of the Blue Ribbon for Kids Commission, as well as education policy makers, representatives from local and state child welfare and local education agencies, elected officials, and foster care advocates.

### 1. Promote efforts to codify federal ESSA protections in State law

Decision-makers and education and child welfare officials in Nevada should support efforts to codify federal ESSA articulated protections in Nevada law. Where relevant and applicable, state officials should explore ways to elaborate on these protections in order to provide further guidance and clarity.

### 2. Encourage the continued collaboration between the Clark County Department of Family Services and the Clark County School District

In recent years, the Clark County Department of Family Services (DFS) and Clark County School District (CCSD) have engaged in regular communication and expanded collaboration as it relates to the care and educational success of students in foster care. The two agencies report meeting regularly and collaborating around shared training. Both DFS and CCSD should continue to collaborate to improve policies and programming designed to improve academic outcomes of youth foster care. The following are areas that warrant further collaboration:

- a. **Ensure school stability and attempt to locate foster homes near the student's school of origin.** Under ESSA, state and local education agencies must assure that students in foster care remain in their school of origin, "unless it is not in their best interest."<sup>35</sup> CCSD and DFS should continue to work together to identify criteria to assess and determine whether the placement is in the "best interest" of the foster care student.
- b. **Create necessary enrollment protocols for foster care students, including the immediate transfer of a foster care student's educational records.** Federal law requires that "the enrollment of a child or youth in foster care must not be denied or delayed because documents normally required for enrollment have not been provided."<sup>36</sup> DFS and CCSD should collaborate to: (1) "establish clear protocols for student enrollment and transportation;" (2) "develop an enrollment protocol and ensure that all enrollment personnel are informed of it;" and (3) train front office personnel (and counselors) on the protocol. DFS and CCSD should monitor and assess the average length of time it takes between when students in foster care attempt to enroll and when they actually are participating fully in school, and create processes to shorten this time, if needed.

- c. **Expedite immediate school enrollment and notify the school that the student is in foster care.** CCSD and DFS should continue to collaborate on formal policies and procedures to ensure CCSD is promptly notified when a student enters foster care or changes placements.
- d. **Continue to encourage the exchange of data between CCSD and DFS in order to ensure the academic success of students in foster care.** Over the last two years, CCSD and DFS have entered into discussions to explore how the two agencies can share relevant data while upholding the privacy of each student in foster care. The two agencies should continue to identify ways to share data in order to support the academic success of students in foster care.

### **3. Consider the establishment of an education passport for students in foster care**

DFS and CCSD should explore additional opportunities for collaboration. The two agencies, for instance, should establish an education passport for students in foster care. In the early 2000s, San Diego established a Health and Education Passport (HEP) for each child in foster care. The HEP document is used to track foster care children's health history and includes all available past and current health, dental and education information. The HEP is shared with the foster parent, biological parent, and healthcare providers, and the youth upon exiting foster care. Similarly, a health and education passport implemented in Clark County would contain information on the foster care student's health and education records. This document could facilitate immediate transfers of students in foster care and could help to ensure that students have uninterrupted access to the programs and services they need to be successful.

### **4. Strengthen the use of the "Academic Learning Plan" for students in foster care**

In Nevada, current law requires students in grades 6-12 to have an Academic Learning Plan. The Academic Learning Plan is a tool used by local education agencies to monitor a student's academic progress and to identify and articulate post-secondary plans and goals (e.g. career and/or college). Additionally, existing statute also requires elementary school students in foster care to have an Academic Learning Plan. According to some education policy analysts, the Academic Learning Plan required in elementary school for children in foster care "is being implemented with fidelity." However, interviews indicate that the Academic Learning Plan is not being implemented with fidelity in high school. Generally, educational leaders have commented that guidance counselors are using the Academic Learning Plan largely as a way of monitoring the number of credits a student has rather than as a tool for career and college planning.

The foster care student's school team should use the existing Academic Learning Plan in a way that more effectively prepares a student in foster care for success both during high school and beyond. Additionally, education policy makers may want to consider requiring an Academic Learning Plan specifically tailored to the needs of students in foster care. State and local child welfare agencies and state and local education agencies should explore creating an Academic Learning Plan specifically designed for students in foster care in grades 6-12.

#### **5. Expand the scope of trauma-related training for educators and services for youth in care**

To address the needs and challenges of students in foster care, schools should put in place trauma informed training initiatives and resources to support students and teachers. Currently, CCSD provides trauma-related training. However, interviews with educators and education officials indicated that the trainings were largely focused on suicide prevention and on youth mental health. Schools should provide teacher training and professional development that educates first year and inexperienced teachers on trauma and provides training on appropriate behavior management intervention strategies. A growing body of research suggests that appropriate trauma-informed behavior management strategies could improve student outcomes.<sup>37</sup> Educators, counselors, and other key figures at schools should participate in trauma-related training.

#### **6. Ensure and expand delivery of educational support services for students in foster care**

CCSD and DFS should continue to coordinate activities and the allocation of resources to ensure that students in foster care are properly supported so that they can succeed in the school environment. The two agencies should leverage existing resources, such as the CASA program or those available from the Clark County School District Community Partnerships Office, to provide the services and supports needed by students in foster care.

#### **7. Ensure that both CCSD and DFS are providing funding for educational support services and programs needed by students in foster care**

Officials should monitor and assess the degree to which local and state child welfare agencies and local education agencies are working together to provide adequate funding for the educational supports and services needed by students in foster care, including but not limited to transportation, tutoring, trauma-intervention counseling, access to extra-curricular opportunities, etc.

#### **8. Evaluate and report regularly to law makers on educational outcomes of students in foster care**

State education officials and lawmakers should require that local child welfare and local education agency officials monitor and regularly report on the educational progress and outcomes of students in foster care. These agencies should be required to report regularly on educational outcomes, and identify strategies and interventions to address any achievement gaps between youth in foster care and their peers.

#### **9. Ensure that Nevada's courts monitor the educational success of students in foster care**

Stakeholders in the foster care system should work to ensure that the courts regularly monitor and evaluate the educational progress of students in foster care. The courts should monitor whether students in foster care have access to the same level of services and opportunities as their peers.

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